

Program Brings Sexual Violence Awareness From Darkness to the Light

Issue

It is estimated that one in four women and one in six males will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime. In the United States, 70 percent of all rapes go unreported. The number of forcible rapes reported to law enforcement in South Carolina is only about 25 percent of the number of clients served in the state's 16 sexual assault centers.

A victim in South Carolina stated, "I think services could be improved by showing it is not the victim's fault. I think more people would seek treatment. Also to inform the community about the abuse that happens, signs to look for and what they can do. It would be good if it were brought into the light instead of being kept in the dark."

Intervention

On April 9, 2008, the rotunda of the South Carolina State Capitol was filled with advocates, victims, survivors, legislators and other concerned citizens in support of ending sexual violence in the state. Dr. Lisbeth Saunders rolled out findings of a 2007-2008 statewide assessment of sexual assault services in the report *South Carolina: A Report of the Day of the Life in the 16 Rape Crisis Centers*. Thanks to funds received from the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant, the data from the report was collected in the following ways:

- A 24-hour census of sexual assault services counting the number of people served by the 16 sexual assault programs across the state;
- A survey of sexual assault victims also conducted through these 16 centers; and
- A survey of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) in South Carolina hospitals.

The 24-hour census of Sexual Assault Programs statewide revealed that in a single day:

- 1,428 people received services;
- 1,115 received community education and training;
- 62 were unable to obtain services they requested; and
- 52 of those unable to obtain services were placed on a waiting list.

Impact

As a result of the findings from the report, recommendations were made to increase rape education in the areas of prevention, training for law enforcement, victim self-advocacy, and increase services to victims in hospitals.

In September 2008, a day-long training was held for 100 professionals including educators, domestic and sexual violence center staff, law enforcement officers and other prevention advocates. We all realize prevention is the key to stopping sexual assault, and it will continue to remain a top priority to all those doing the work in our state.

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